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**ABSTRACT:**

**PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED:** To execute correction of pixel variation with respect to a recording element array as needed at such time as a photographic paper is replaced.

**SOLUTION:** When a recording medium newly replaced corresponding to a detection signal indicative of a containing means 3 that contains the recording medium is different from that heretofore used, a control means 7 generates a test pattern and a density sensor 51 reads a visible image of the test pattern, then correction of a correction value is executed. As a result, when the recording medium is replaced, the correction value is corrected so as to be in conformity with the recording medium. When it is replaced with the same type of the recording medium, the correction value is not corrected. As a result, it is possible to achieve an image forming apparatus capable of executing correction of pixel variation with respect to a recording element array on an as needed basis.



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## CLAIMS

[Claim(s)]

[Claim 1] In the image formation equipment which performs visible image formation with the given picture signal The storing means for storing a record medium, and a detection means for said storing means to detect having been exchanged and output a detection signal. Two or more record components and a storage means to memorize the correction value corresponding to each of two or more of said record components. An amendment means to amend said given picture signal with said correction value. The driving means which drives said two or more record components based on the picture signal amended by said amendment means, and forms a latent image on a record medium. The development means for developing the record medium with which the latent image was formed, and obtaining a visible image. A test pattern generating means to give the signal for test pattern generating to said two or more record components, and to form a test pattern latent image on a record medium. Image formation equipment characterized by having a reading means for reading the test pattern visible image which was prepared into the record-medium conveyance path, was developed by said development means, and was obtained, and a correction means for correcting said correction value based on the signal read by the aforementioned reading means.

[Claim 2] Image formation equipment according to claim 1 characterized by what said test pattern generating means, a reading means, and a correction means are operated, and it has the control means controlled to correct said correction value for according to said detection signal.

[Claim 3] In the image formation equipment which performs visible image formation with the given picture signal The storing means for storing a record medium, and the 1st detection means for said storing means to detect having been exchanged and output a detection signal. The 2nd detection means for detecting the information on the record medium stored in said storing means. Two or more record components and a storage means to memorize the amendment data corresponding to each of two or more of said record components. An amendment means to amend said given picture signal with said correction value. The driving means which drives said two or more record components based on the picture signal amended by said amendment means, and forms a latent image on a record medium. The development means for developing the record medium with which the latent image was formed, and obtaining a visible image. A test pattern generating means to give the signal for test pattern generating to said two or more record components, and to form a test pattern latent image on a record medium. Image formation equipment characterized by having a reading means for reading the test pattern visible image which was prepared into the record-medium conveyance path, was developed by said development means, and was obtained, and a correction means for correcting said correction value based on the signal read by the aforementioned reading means.

[Claim 4] Image formation equipment according to claim 3 characterized by what said test pattern generating means, a reading means, and a correction means are operated, and it has the control means controlled to correct said correction value for when the record medium of a storing means by which it was newly exchanged differs from the record medium currently used by then according to the detection signal by the detection means of said detection.

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## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[Detailed Description of the Invention]

[0001]

[Field of the Invention] Especially this invention relates to the improvement of the image nonuniformity by the luminescence property of the record component of image formation equipment about image formation equipment.

[0002]

[Description of the Prior Art] Although it is necessary to make the luminescence property of each record component into homogeneity when forming a latent image on sensitive material by two or more record components (LED array), a luminescence property will not be able to be made the same at all in fact, but variation will arise.

[0003] Then, a test pattern signal is beforehand given to two or more record components, a test pattern is obtained, this test pattern visible image is formed on sensitive material, the concentration is read with a scanner etc., and it asks for the amendment data for every component. And it is performed by amending the picture signal given on the occasion of actual image formation with the correction value which was able to be calculated that it is going to lose the image nonuniformity by variation.

[0004]

[Problem(s) to be Solved by the Invention] However, on the occasion of the latent-image formation in the record medium which consists of sensitive material, the property of record-medium confidence is one of the causes which produce pixel nonuniformity. For this reason, when record media are exchanged, it is necessary to perform pixel nonuniformity amendment again.

[0005] However, with actual equipment, when exchanged in a record medium, it could not distinguish whether it was exchanged for a different record medium from before, and whether it was exchanged for the same record medium, and was not able to know whether pixel nonuniformity amendment should have been performed.

[0006] Furthermore, when the print of a test pattern was outputted, it was a very difficult activity to specify the light emitting device of each [ the information read in there ], and to amend for every required light emitting device.

[0007] This invention is made in view of the above-mentioned technical problem, and it aims at offering the image formation equipment which can perform pixel nonuniformity amendment of as opposed to a record component array by the way it is [ amendment ] the need.

[0008]

[Means for Solving the Problem] It seems that namely, the invention in this application which solves the above-mentioned technical problem is described below. In the image formation equipment which performs visible image formation with the picture signal by which the 1st invention was given. The storing means for storing a record medium, and a detection means for said storing means to detect having been exchanged and output a detection signal, Two or more record components and a storage means to memorize the correction value corresponding to each of two or more of said record components, An amendment means to amend said given

picture signal with said correction value. The driving means which drives said two or more record components based on the picture signal amended by said amendment means, and forms a latent image on a record medium. The development means for developing the record medium with which the latent image was formed, and obtaining a visible image. A test pattern generating means to give the signal for test pattern generating to said two or more record components, and to form a test pattern latent image on a record medium. It is image formation equipment characterized by having a reading means for reading the test pattern visible image which was prepared into the record-medium conveyance path, was developed by said development means, and was obtained, and a correction means for correcting said correction value based on the signal read by the aforementioned reading means.

[0009] Moreover, in this 1st invention, what said test pattern generating means, a reading means, and a correction means are operated, and it has the control means controlled to correct said correction value for according to said detection signal is desirable.

[0010] With the image formation equipment of this 1st invention, according to the detection signal which shows exchange of the storing means which stored the record medium, a test pattern is generated and it is made to correct correction value by reading the visible image of that test pattern. Consequently, when there is exchange of a record medium, correction value is corrected so that it may agree in that record medium.

[0011] Consequently, the image formation equipment which can perform pixel nonuniformity amendment of as opposed to a record component array by the way it is [ amendment ] the need is realizable. In the image formation equipment which performs visible image formation with the picture signal by which the 2nd invention was given. The storing means for storing a record medium, and the 1st detection means for said storing means to detect having been exchanged and output a detection signal. The 2nd detection means for detecting the information on the record medium stored in said storing means. Two or more record components and a storage means to memorize the amendment data corresponding to each of two or more of said record components. An amendment means to amend said given picture signal with said correction value. The driving means which drives said two or more record components based on the picture signal amended by said amendment means, and forms a latent image on a record medium. The development means for developing the record medium with which the latent image was formed, and obtaining a visible image. A test pattern generating means to give the signal for test pattern generating to said two or more record components, and to form a test pattern latent image on a record medium. It is the image formation means characterized by having a reading means for reading the test pattern visible image which was prepared into the record-medium conveyance path, was developed by said development means, and was obtained, and a correction means for correcting said correction value based on the signal read by the aforementioned reading means.

[0012] Moreover, when the record medium of a storing means by which it was newly exchanged differs from the record medium currently used by then in this 2nd invention according to the detection signal by the detection means of said detection, what said test pattern generating means, a reading means, and a correction means are operated, and it has the control means controlled to correct said correction value for is desirable.

[0013] With the image formation equipment of this 2nd invention, when the newly exchanged record medium differs from the record medium currently used by then according to the detection signal which shows exchange of the storing means which stored the record medium, a test pattern is generated and it is made to correct correction value by reading the visible image of that test pattern.

[0014] Consequently, at the time of exchange of a record medium, correction value is corrected so that it may agree in that record medium. Moreover, when exchanged for the same record medium even as it, correction of correction value is not made.

[0015] Consequently, the image formation equipment which can perform pixel nonuniformity amendment of as opposed to a record component array by the way it is [ amendment ] the need is realizable.

[0016]

[Embodiment of the Invention] Below, the example of a gestalt of operation of this invention is

explained at a detail.

<the configuration of image formation equipment> — the whole image formation equipment configuration used in the example of a gestalt of this operation with reference to drawing 1 is explained first.

[0017] The block diagram in which drawing 1 shows the electric configuration of the principal part of the example of a gestalt of operation of this invention, the block diagram in which drawing 2 shows typically the electric configuration of the whole example of a gestalt of operation of this invention, and drawing 3 are the perspective views showing the appearance configuration of equipment.

[0018] First, the mechanical configuration and arrangement of the whole equipment are explained with reference to drawing 3. The exposure processing section 4 which the image-formation equipment 1 of the gestalt of this operation equips the left lateral of the body 2 of equipment with the magazine loading section 3, and is exposed in the body 2 of equipment to the sensitive material which is a record medium, and the development section 5 which carry out the development of the exposed sensitive material, dries, and create a print are had, and the created print is discharged by the tray 6 prepared in the right lateral of the body 2 of equipment. Furthermore, inside the body 2 of equipment, the upper part location of the exposure processing section 4 is equipped with the control section 7.

[0019] Moreover, CRT display 8 is arranged in the upper part of the body 2 of equipment. The film scanner section 9 which is transparency manuscript reading equipment on the left-hand side of CRT display 8 is arranged, and the reflection copy input unit 10 is arranged on right-hand side.

[0020] There is photosensitive material as a manuscript read from the film scanner section 9 or the reflection copy input unit 10, and it is this photosensitive material. If it carries out, a negative color film and a color reversal film are mentioned. It can change into digital information by the film scanner of this film scanner section 9, and can consider as piece image information. Moreover, when photosensitive material is a color paper, it can be made piece image information with the flat bed scanner of the reflection copy input device 10.

[0021] A control unit 11 is arranged at a before [ CRT display 8 ] side, the information input means 12 is formed in this control unit 11, and the information input means 12 consists of touch panels etc.

[0022] Moreover, in the location of the control section 7 of the body 2 of equipment, PC card 13 is formed in PC card set section 14 in which a plug is possible, and it has the memory with which picturized with the digital camera to PC card 13, and two or more piece image data was remembered to be. The PC card which has the memory the piece image data as used in the field of this invention was remembered to be shows a CompactFlash card, SmartMedia, etc. which were connected to for example, the flash plate ATA card or the PC card adapter.

[0023] Below, with reference to drawing 1 and drawing 2, an electric configuration is explained about the principal part of image formation equipment 1. Based on the command information from the information input means 12, the control section 7 of image formation equipment 1 reads the information from the film scanner section 9 or the reflection copy input device 10, obtains image data, and displays it on CRT8. Moreover, it has the data accumulation means 71, and image data and the ordering information (information on how many sheet print is created from the image of which piece, information on print size, etc.) corresponding to it are memorized for the data accumulation means 71, and sequential are recording is carried out. Moreover, the control section 7 serves as a test pattern generating means to generate a test pattern, and a correction means to make correction of correction value.

[0024] From the film scanner section 9, the piece image from the negative film [ finishing / development ] N is inputted, and the piece image from the print P which could be burned on printing paper and carried out the development of the piece image is inputted from the reflection copy input unit 10.

[0025] Moreover, the control section 7 has the image-processing section 70, carries out the image processing of the image data in this image-processing section 70, forms the image data for exposure, and sends it to the exposure processing section 4. In the exposure processing

section 4, exposure of an image is performed to sensitive material from two or more record components (LED array), and the development of the sensitive material exposed by the development section 5 in delivery and the development section 5 in this sensitive material is carried out, it dries, and a print is created.

[0026] Moreover, this image formation equipment 1 has a piece image input means 80 to input piece image data from a record medium, a template storage means 81 to memorize the data of a template, and a selection means 82 to choose the predetermined template memorized by the template storage means 81.

[0027] Here, the piece image input means 80 consists of the film scanner section 9, a reflection copy input unit 10, and PC card set section 14 grade, and inputs piece image data from the record medium of a negative film N, Print P, and PC card 13 grade.

[0028] Moreover, the data of at least one template which sets a background image and a synthetic field to the template storage means 81 are memorized beforehand. A control unit 11 is equipped with the selection means 82, and it chooses a predetermined template from two or more templates which set by actuation of an operator and were beforehand memorized by the template storage means 81, compounds piece image data by the selected template, and creates the inputted print of piece image data. Composition by this template is performed by the well-known chroma-key method etc.

[0029] In addition, although the display means A, the data accumulation means 71, the template storage means 81, a control section 7, the film scanner section 9, the reflection copy input unit 10, and PC card set section 14 are formed in the body 2 of equipment in one, they may prepare any one or more as another object. In this case, image formation equipment 1 is treated as a print creation system.

[0030] In addition, the sensor 31 which judges the existence or classification of exchange of the magazine loading section 3 is formed in the body 2 side of equipment with which the magazine loading section 3 is attached. This sensor 31 may only detect the existence of exchange of the magazine loading section 3, and distinguishes the class of printing paper inside the magazine loading section 3 etc.

[0031] Moreover, near the printed output section of the development section 5, the concentration sensor 51 for reading the test pattern of a print is formed. As for this concentration sensor 51, it is [ / near the output of the development section 5 ] desirable that it is the line sensor which has the resolution which can read concentration and the gradation property of each record component on a test pattern.

[0032] With <actuation of image formation equipment>, and time in the image formation equipment which is exposed by making an LED array emit light according to a picture signal, forms a latent image on sensitive material, and forms an image by the development, as shown in drawing 4 (a), two or more LED (about 4000 pieces A4 dip : to 297mm) is arranged continuously, for example.

[0033] In each LED, according to a manufacture error, even if it is the case where the seal of approval of the same electrical potential difference is carried out, variation the amount of luminescence is indicated to be by drawing 4 (b) will be produced. And it becomes nonuniformity, and the variation in this amount of luminescence appears in an image, and serves as hindrance of suitable image formation.

[0034] If the seal-of-approval electrical potential difference for every LED is tuned finely separately, it is also possible to make the amount of luminescence of all LED into homogeneity, but when there is much number as thousands of pieces, it is usual states that circuit cost goes up and that equipment is enlarged by the tooth space of a circuit own [ for adjustment ], obtain now, and another following solution means are adopted from things.

[0035] As another solution means, the luminescence time amount per pixel of each LED is changed, and when it sees as concentration per pixel, the technique adjusted so that it may become the concentration same with each LED question is taken.

[0036] When the seal of approval of the same electrical potential difference is carried out to drawing 5, the case where the concentration in every pixel formed of LED-A which is two from which the amount of luminescence differs, and LED-B is made in agreement is explained.

[0037] Since the amount of luminescence of LED-A corresponding to Pixel A is higher than LED-B corresponding to Pixel B, when the light is switched on by the same time amount with face, the direction of Pixel A will become high concentration and a concentration difference will arise to a pixel question.

[0038] Then, the approach that the concentration difference of Pixel A and Pixel B is abolished as a result is adopted by making lighting time amount T of LED-B corresponding to Pixel B longer than the lighting time amount of LED-A corresponding to Pixel A.

[0039] Thus, adjustment of the lighting time amount of each LED for abolishing a concentration difference is beforehand built in a control section 7 as "correction value" at the time of image formation equipment shipment. However, when exposing to the sensitive material using a silver halide particle, another problem will arise.

[0040] Although the luminescence light of adjoining LED overlaps from carrying out contiguity arrangement of two or more LED, what the concentration of the overlapped part becomes may differ for every sensitive material.

[0041] That is, although the concentration to generate becomes like the continuous line of drawing 6 (a) in the sensitive material a, it becomes the case where the concentration to generate serves as a continuous line of drawing 6 (b) in the sensitive material another b.

[0042] Two or more LED does not emit light at a control top coincidence term, but is very short time amount \*\*\*\*, and emits light in order. Then, it is because the multiplex exposure effect of meaning that exposure was performed to multiplex, and concentration going up only more than the sum of each amount of luminescence, or falling by multiplex exposure in the part which the luminescence light of two LED overlaps is generated.

[0043] If the amount of luminescence for obtaining concentration predetermined by one exposure is set to E1, and the sum of the amount of luminescence which is needed by two exposure is set to E2 in order to obtain the same concentration, E1/E2 are called sensibility R/C ( $\neq$ alpha), and it is known that alpha changes with classes of sensitized material.

[0044] Although it is \*\*\*\* alpha= 1 in the sensitive material of a which was shown in drawing 6 (a) in the above-mentioned case, it is alpha< 1 in the sensitive material of B shown in drawing 6 (b). Thinking as a factor which makes a problem complicate furthermore is the point that it is going to double concentration by lighting time amount within 1 pixel mentioned above.

[0045] As shown in drawing 5, when the seal of approval of the same electrical potential difference is carried out, as for the relation of the luminescence time amount T1 of LED-A with the large luminescence quantity of light, and the luminescence time amount T2 of LED-B with the low luminescence quantity of light, in the case of T1<T2, the concentration of Pixel A and Pixel B will be similarly observed as a result.

[0046] Here, when shown in drawing 5, in the part in which the luminescence quantity of light of LED-B overlaps LED-A, as mentioned above, a multiplex exposure effect occurs, and concentration changes with sensitive material. However, concentration as it is appears about the part which the luminescence quantity of light of two LED does not overlap.

[0047] Therefore, when it is going to make two pixels into the same concentration correctly, the point what the sensibility R/C of the point which has the part which the luminescence quantity of light of two LED overlaps, and its sensitive material has become must be taken into consideration.

[0048] It is necessary to treat two or more kinds of two or more sensitive-material manufacturers' sensitive material, and the sensibility R/C of each sensitive material differs delicately in actual equipment. However, even if it is the case where all sensitive material is used, in order to obtain a good image without nonuniformity, it is necessary to control the lighting time amount of all LED and to ask for correction value beforehand the appearance from which an image without nonuniformity is obtained.

[0049] Then, in the example of a gestalt of this operation, whenever it is newly loaded with sensitive material, the concentration of the sensitive material whose observation was once exposed, performed the development using the image for correction value detection memorized beforehand, and was attained as image concentration is measured, and the adjusted value of every pixel and the correction value for every LED is calculated from the measured

concentration difference.

[0050] It becomes possible to amend beforehand so that a good image without nonuniformity may be obtained by correcting the original correction value by it according to printing paper even if loaded with the sensitive material which has different sensibility R/C by this.

[0051] moreover, when exchanged for the record medium completely same even when exchanged in a record medium as a basis Information on the printing paper of the magazine loading section 3 since it is not necessary to perform pixel nonuniformity amendment anew (a manufacture name, a lot number, etc.) the sequence, bar code, IC chip, etc. of a projection -- giving -- it asks by the sensor 31, and only when the record medium which was being used to last time differs from the record medium newly exchanged this time, a control section 7 controls to perform pixel nonuniformity amendment.

[0052] That is, when the record medium newly exchanged according to the detection signal from a sensor 31 about exchange of the magazine loading section 3 which stored the printing paper 42 which is a record medium, and which is a storing means differs from the record medium currently used by then, a control section 7 generates a test pattern, the test pattern is made to expose in the exposure processing section 4, the test pattern is developed in the development section 5, and it considers as the print of a visible image. And the print P0 (refer to drawing 2) of the test pattern is read by the concentration sensor 51, and the reading result is fed back to a control section 7. And the control section 7 is made to correct correction value with reference to the reading result of a test pattern.

[0053] Consequently, at the time of exchange of printing paper (at the time of exchange of the magazine loading section 3), correction value is corrected so that it may agree on that printing paper. In addition, when a sensor 31 is made simple and there is exchange of the magazine loading section 3, creation and reading of a test print may surely be performed, and correction value may be corrected. Moreover, as the information on the printing paper in the magazine loading section 3 is read by the sensor 31 to this, when it becomes clear that it was exchanged for the same printing paper by the detection signal of a sensor 31, correction of the correction value mentioned above may not be made not to be made. Consequently, when the need arises, the image formation equipment which can perform pixel nonuniformity amendment to a record component array automatically can be realized.

[0054] Although the gestalt of this operation showed what is printing with the digital printer as image formation equipment 1, this invention is applicable to the printers (the conventional mini-laboratory etc.) by the optical exposure method similarly.

[0055]

[Effect of the Invention] With the image formation equipment of the 1st invention, according to the detection signal which shows exchange of the storing means which stored the record medium, a test pattern is generated and it is made to correct correction value by reading the visible image of the test pattern. Consequently, when there is exchange of a record medium, correction value is corrected so that it may agree in that record medium. Consequently, the image formation equipment which can perform pixel nonuniformity amendment of as opposed to a record component array by the way it is [ amendment ] the need is realizable.

[0056] With the image formation equipment of the 2nd invention, when the newly exchanged record medium differs from the record medium currently used by then according to the detection signal which shows exchange of the storing means which stored the record medium, a test pattern is generated and it is made to correct correction value by reading the visible image of the test pattern. Consequently, at the time of exchange of a record medium, correction value is corrected so that it may agree in that record medium. Moreover, when exchanged for the same record medium even as it, correction of correction value is not made. Consequently, the image formation equipment which can perform pixel nonuniformity amendment of as opposed to a record component array by the way it is [ amendment ] the need is realizable.

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## DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[Brief Description of the Drawings]

[Drawing 1] It is the functional block diagram showing the configuration of the image formation equipment used in the example of a gestalt of operation of this invention.

[Drawing 2] It is the functional block diagram showing the configuration of the image formation equipment used in the example of a gestalt of operation of this invention.

[Drawing 3] It is the perspective view showing the appearance configuration of the image formation equipment used in the example of a gestalt of operation of this invention.

[Drawing 4] It is the explanatory view showing the record component used in the image formation equipment of the example of a gestalt of operation of this invention, and the situation of luminescence nonuniformity.

[Drawing 5] It is the explanatory view showing the record component used in the image formation equipment of the example of a gestalt of operation of this invention, and the situation of amendment of luminescence nonuniformity.

[Drawing 6] It is the explanatory view showing the result produced on the printing paper which changes with amendments of the record component used in the image formation equipment of the example of a gestalt of operation of this invention, and luminescence nonuniformity.

[Description of Notations]

1 Image Formation Equipment

2 Body of Equipment

3 Magazine Loading Section

4 Exposure Processing Section

5 Development Section

6 Tray

7 Control Section

8 CRT Display Section

9 Scanner

31 Sensor

51 Concentration Sensor

[Translation done.]





## 【特許請求の範囲】

【請求項 1】 与えられた画像信号により可視画像形成を行う画像形成装置において、記録媒体を格納するための格納手段と、前記格納手段が交換されたことを検知して検知信号を出力するための検知手段と、複数の記録素子と、前記複数の記録素子の各々に対応した補正値を記憶する記憶手段と、前記与えられた画像信号を前記補正値によって補正する補正手段と、前記補正手段によって補正された画像信号に基づいて前記複数の記録素子を駆動して記録媒体上に潜像を形成する駆動手段と、潜像が形成された記録媒体を現像して可視画像を得るための現像手段と、前記複数の記録素子にテストパターン発生用の信号を与えて記録媒体上にテストパターン潜像を形成するテストパターン発生手段と、記録媒体搬送経路中に設けられ前記現像手段によって現像されて得られたテストパターン可視像を読取るための読取手段と、前記読取手段によって読み取られた信号に基づいて前記補正値を修正するための修正手段と、を有することを特徴とする画像形成装置。

【請求項 2】 前記検知信号に応じて、前記テストパターン発生手段、読取手段及び修正手段を動作させ、前記補正値の修正を行うように制御する制御手段を有する、ことを特徴とする請求項 1 記載の画像形成装置。

【請求項 3】 与えられた画像信号により可視画像形成を行う画像形成装置において、記録媒体を格納するための格納手段と、前記格納手段が交換されたことを検知して検知信号を出力するための第 1 の検知手段と、前記格納手段に格納された記録媒体の情報を検知するための第 2 の検知手段と、複数の記録素子と、前記複数の記録素子の各々に対応した補正データを記憶する記憶手段と、前記与えられた画像信号を前記補正値によって補正する補正手段と、前記補正手段によって補正された画像信号に基づいて前記複数の記録素子を駆動して記録媒体上に潜像を形成する駆動手段と、潜像が形成された記録媒体を現像して可視画像を得るための現像手段と、前記複数の記録素子にテストパターン発生用の信号を与えて記録媒体上にテストパターン潜像を形成するテストパターン発生手段と、記録媒体搬送経路中に設けられ前記現像手段によって現

像されて得られたテストパターン可視像を読取るための読取手段と、

前記読取手段によって読み取られた信号に基づいて前記補正値を修正するための修正手段と、を有することを特徴とする画像形成装置。

【請求項 4】 前記検知の検知手段による検知信号に応じて、新たに交換された格納手段の記録媒体がそれまでに使用されていた記録媒体と異なる場合に、前記テストパターン発生手段、読取手段及び修正手段を動作させ、前記補正値の修正を行うように制御する制御手段を有する、ことを特徴とする請求項 3 記載の画像形成装置。

## 【発明の詳細な説明】

## 【0001】

【発明の属する技術分野】本発明は画像形成装置に関し、とくに、画像形成装置の記録素子の発光特性による画像ムラの改善に関する。

## 【0002】

【従来の技術】複数の記録素子（LED アレイ）により感光材料上に潜像を形成する場合、各記録素子の発光特性を均一にする必要があるが、実際には発光特性を全く同一とすることはできず、バラツキが生じてしまう。

【0003】そこで、予めテストパターン信号を複数の記録素子に与えてテストパターンを得、該テストパターン可視画像を感光材料上に形成し、その濃度をスキャナなどで読み取って各素子毎の補正データを求める。そして、実際の画像形成に際して与えられる画像信号を、求められた補正値によって補正することによって、バラツキによる画像ムラをなくそうとすることが行われている。

## 【0004】

【発明が解決しようとする課題】しかしながら、感光材料からなる記録媒体における潜像形成に際しては、記録媒体自信の特性が画素ムラを生じる原因の一つとなっている。このため、記録媒体を交換した場合には、再度画素ムラ補正を行うことが必要となる。

【0005】しかし、実際の装置では、記録媒体が交換された場合に、以前と異なる記録媒体に交換されたのか、同一の記録媒体に交換されたのかを判別することができず、画素ムラ補正を行うべきか否かを知ることができなかった。

【0006】さらに、テストパターンのプリントを出力した場合に、そこから読み取った情報で個々の発光素子を特定し、必要な発光素子毎に補正をすることは極めて困難な作業であった。

【0007】本発明は上記技術的課題に鑑みてなされたものであって、必要なときに記録素子アレイに対する画素ムラ補正を行える画像形成装置を提供することを目的とする。

## 【0008】

【課題を解決するための手段】すなわち、上記課題を解

決する本願発明は以下に述べるようなものである。第1の発明は、与えられた画像信号により可視画像形成を行う画像形成装置において、記録媒体を格納するための格納手段と、前記格納手段が交換されたことを検知して検知信号を出力するための検知手段と、複数の記録素子と、前記複数の記録素子の各々に対応した補正値を記憶する記憶手段と、前記与えられた画像信号を前記補正値によって補正する補正手段と、前記補正手段によって補正された画像信号に基づいて前記複数の記録素子を駆動して記録媒体上に潜像を形成する駆動手段と、潜像が形成された記録媒体を現像して可視画像を得るための現像手段と、前記複数の記録素子にテストパターン発生用の信号を与えて記録媒体上にテストパターン潜像を形成するテストパターン発生手段と、記録媒体搬送経路中に設けられ前記現像手段によって現像されて得られたテストパターン可視像を読み取るための読取手段と、前記読取手段によって読み取られた信号に基づいて前記補正値を修正するための修正手段と、を有することを特徴とする画像形成装置である。

【0009】また、この第1の発明においては、前記検知信号に応じて、前記テストパターン発生手段、読取手段及び修正手段を動作させ、前記補正値の修正を行うように制御する制御手段を有する、ことが望ましい。

【0010】この第1の発明の画像形成装置では、記録媒体を格納した格納手段の交換を示す検知信号に応じて、テストパターンを発生させ、そのテストパターンの可視画像を読み取ることで補正値の修正を行うようにしている。この結果、記録媒体の交換が有った場合には、その記録媒体に合致するように補正値が修正される。

【0011】この結果、必要なときに記録素子アレイに対する画素ムラ補正を行える画像形成装置を実現できる。第2の発明は、与えられた画像信号により可視画像形成を行う画像形成装置において、記録媒体を格納するための格納手段と、前記格納手段が交換されたことを検知して検知信号を出力するための第1の検知手段と、前記格納手段に格納された記録媒体の情報を検知するための第2の検知手段と、複数の記録素子と、前記複数の記録素子の各々に対応した補正データを記憶する記憶手段と、前記与えられた画像信号を前記補正値によって補正する補正手段と、前記補正手段によって補正された画像信号に基づいて前記複数の記録素子を駆動して記録媒体上に潜像を形成する駆動手段と、潜像が形成された記録媒体を現像して可視画像を得るための現像手段と、前記複数の記録素子にテストパターン発生用の信号を与えて記録媒体上にテストパターン潜像を形成するテストパターン発生手段と、記録媒体搬送経路中に設けられ前記現像手段によって現像されて得られたテストパターン可視像を読み取るための読取手段と、前記読取手段によって読み取られた信号に基づいて前記補正値を修正するための修正手段と、を有することを特徴とする画像形成手段で

ある。

【0012】また、この第2の発明では、前記検知の検知手段による検知信号に応じて、新たに交換された格納手段の記録媒体がそれまでに使用されていた記録媒体と異なる場合に、前記テストパターン発生手段、読取手段及び修正手段を動作させ、前記補正値の修正を行うように制御する制御手段を有する、ことが望ましい。

【0013】この第2の発明の画像形成装置では、記録媒体を格納した格納手段の交換を示す検知信号に応じて、新たに交換された記録媒体がそれまでに使用されていた記録媒体と異なる場合に、テストパターンを発生させ、そのテストパターンの可視画像を読み取ることで補正値の修正を行うようにしている。

【0014】この結果、記録媒体の交換時には、その記録媒体に合致するように補正値が修正される。また、それまでと同じ記録媒体に交換された場合には、補正値の修正は行われない。

【0015】この結果、必要なときに記録素子アレイに対する画素ムラ補正を行える画像形成装置を実現できる。

【0016】

【発明の実施の形態】以下に、本発明の実施の形態例を詳細に説明する。

<画像形成装置の構成>まず、図1を参照して本実施の形態例で使用する画像形成装置の全体構成について説明する。

【0017】図1は本発明の実施の形態例の主要部の電氣的構成を示すブロック図、図2は本発明の実施の形態例の全体の電氣的構成を模式的に示すブロック図、図3は装置の外観構成を示す斜視図である。

【0018】まず、図3を参照して装置の全体の機械的構成や配置について説明する。この実施の形態の画像形成装置1は、装置本体2の左側面にマガジン装填部3を備え、装置本体2内には記録媒体である感光材料に露光する露光処理部4と、露光された感光材料を現像処理して乾燥し、プリントを作成する現像処理部5とが備えられ、作成されたプリントは装置本体2の右側面に設けられたトレイ6に排出される。さらに、装置本体2の内部には、露光処理部4の上方位置に制御部7が備えられている。

【0019】また、装置本体2の上部には、CRTディスプレイ8が配置されている。CRTディスプレイ8の左側に透過原稿読み込み装置であるところのフィルムスキャナ部9が配置され、右側に反射原稿入力装置10が配置されている。

【0020】フィルムスキャナ部9や反射原稿入力装置10から読み込まれる原稿として写真感光材料があり、この写真感光材料としては、カラーネガフィルム、カラーリバーサルフィルムが挙げられる。このフィルムスキャナ部9のフィルムスキャナでデジタル情報に変換

し、駒画像情報とすることができる。また、写真感光材料がカラーペーパーの場合、反射原稿入力装置10のフラットベッドスキャナで駒画像情報にすることができる。

【0021】CRTディスプレイ8の前側に操作部11が配置され、この操作部11に情報入力手段12が設けられ、情報入力手段12は、例えばタッチパネル等で構成される。

【0022】また、装置本体2の制御部7の位置には、PCカード13を差し込み可能なPCカードセット部14が設けられており、PCカード13にはデジタルカメラで撮像して複数の駒画像データが記憶されたメモリを有する。この発明でいう駒画像データが記憶されたメモリを有するPCカードとは、例えばフラッシュATAカードやPCカードアダプタに接続されたコンパクトフラッシュカードやスマートメディア等を示す。

【0023】つぎに、図1と図2を参照して画像形成装置1の主要部について、電気的な構成を説明する。画像形成装置1の制御部7は、情報入力手段12からの指令情報に基づき、フィルムスキャナ部9や反射原稿入力装置10からの原稿情報の読み込みを行い、画像データを得てCRT8に表示する。また、データ蓄積手段71を備え、データ蓄積手段71に画像データとそれに対応する注文情報（どの駒の画像から何枚プリントを作成するかの情報、プリントサイズの情報等）とを記憶し順次蓄積する。また、制御部7はテストパターンの発生を行うテストパターン発生手段と、補正値の修正を行う修正手段とを兼ねている。

【0024】フィルムスキャナ部9からは、現像済のネガフィルムNからの駒画像が入力され、反射原稿入力装置10からは駒画像を印画紙に焼き付けて現像処理したプリントPからの駒画像が入力される。

【0025】また、制御部7は、画像処理部70を有しており、この画像処理部70で画像データを画像処理して露光用画像データを形成し、露光処理部4に送る。露光処理部4では、感光材料に複数の記録素子（LEDアレイ）から画像の露光が行われ、この感光材料を現像処理部5に送り、現像処理部5では露光された感光材料を現像処理して乾燥し、プリントを作成する。

【0026】また、この画像形成装置1は、記録媒体から駒画像データを入力する駒画像入力手段80と、テンプレートのデータを記憶するテンプレート記憶手段81と、テンプレート記憶手段81に記憶された所定のテンプレートを選択する選択手段82とを有する。

【0027】ここで、駒画像入力手段80は、フィルムスキャナ部9、反射原稿入力装置10及びPCカードセット部14等から構成され、ネガフィルムN、プリントP及びPCカード13等の記録媒体から駒画像データを入力する。

【0028】また、テンプレート記憶手段81には、背

景画像と合成領域を設定する少なくとも1個のテンプレートのデータが予め記憶されている。選択手段82は、操作部11に備えられ、オペレータの操作によりセットしてテンプレート記憶手段81に予め記憶された複数のテンプレートから所定のテンプレートを選択し、駒画像データは選択されたテンプレートにより合成し、入力された駒画像データのプリントを作成する。このテンプレートによる合成は、たとえば、周知のクロマキー法などによって行なわれる。

【0029】なお、表示手段A、データ蓄積手段71、テンプレート記憶手段81、制御部7、フィルムスキャナ部9、反射原稿入力装置10及びPCカードセット部14は、装置本体2に一体的に設けられているが、いずれか1つ以上を別体として設けてもよい。この場合には、画像形成装置1は、プリント作成システムとして扱われる。

【0030】なお、マガジン装填部3が取り付けられる装置本体2側にマガジン装填部3の交換の有無または種別を判定するセンサ31が設けられている。このセンサ31は単にマガジン装填部3の交換の有無を検知するものであってもよいし、また、マガジン装填部3の内部の印画紙の種類などを判別可能なものであってもよい。

【0031】また、現像処理部5のプリント出力部近傍には、プリントのテストパターンを読み取るための濃度センサ51が設けられている。この濃度センサ51は、現像処理部5の出力近傍において、テストパターン上の各記録素子の濃度を読み取り可能な解像度と階調特性を有するラインセンサであることが好ましい。

【0032】＜画像形成装置の動作＞ところで、画像信号に応じてLEDアレイを発光させることにより露光を行い、感光材料上に潜像を形成し、現像処理によって画像を形成する画像形成装置においては、例えば、図4(a)に示されるように複数のLED（A縦幅：2.97mmに対して約4000個程度）が連続的に配置されている。

【0033】それぞれのLEDには製造誤差により、同一の電圧を印可した場合であっても、その発光量が図4(b)に記載されるようなバラツキを生じてしまう。そして、この発光量のバラツキが、ムラとなって画像に現れ、適切な画像形成の妨げとなる。

【0034】各LED毎の印可電圧を個々に微調整すれば、全てのLEDの発光量を均一にすることも可能であるが、個数が数千個と多い場合には回路コストが上がってしまうこと、調整用の回路自身のスペースにより装置が大型化してしまうことから、以下のような別の解決手段が採用されるのが常である。

【0035】別の解決手段としては、各LEDの1ピクセルあたりの発光時間を変化させて、1ピクセルあたりの濃度として見た場合に各LED間で同じ様な濃度となるように調整する手法がとられる。

【0036】図5に同一電圧を印可した場合に発光量が異なる2つのLED-AとLED-Bとによって形成される1ピクセル毎の濃度を一致させる場合について説明する。

【0037】ピクセルAに対応したLED-Aの発光量はピクセルBに対応したLED-Bより高いので、同一時間幅で点灯した場合には、ピクセルAの方が高い濃度となり、ピクセル間に濃度差が生じてしまう。

【0038】そこで、ピクセルBに対応するLED-Bの点灯時間TをピクセルAに対応するLED-Aの点灯時間より長くすることにより、結果としてピクセルAとピクセルBとの濃度差をなくすような方法が採用される。

【0039】このようにして濃度差をなくすための個々のLEDの点灯時間の調整は、「補正值」として、画像形成装置出荷時に予め制御部7に内蔵される。ところが、ハロゲン化銀粒子を用いた感光材料に露光する場合には、別の問題が生じることとなる。

【0040】複数のLEDを近接配置することから、隣接するLEDの発光光同士がオーバーラップするが、オーバーラップした部分の濃度がどのようになるかは、感光材料毎に異なる場合がある。

【0041】すなわち、aという感光材料では、発生する濃度が図6(a)の実線のようになるが、別のbという感光材料では、発生する濃度が図6(b)の実線となる場合となる。

【0042】複数のLEDは、制御上同時期に発光されるのではなく、非常に短い時間間隔で、順番に発光されていく。そこで、2つのLEDの発光光がオーバーラップする部分では、多重に露光が行われたこととなり、多重露光によって、単にそれぞれの発光量の和以上に濃度が上がる又は下がるという多重露光効果が発生するからである。

【0043】一回の露光で所定の濃度を得るための発光量をE1とし、同じ濃度を得るために2回の露光が必要となる発光量の和をE2とすると、 $E1/E2$ を感度上昇率( $=\alpha$ )と言い、 $\alpha$ は感材の種類によって異なることが知られている。

【0044】前述の場合では、図6(a)に示されたaの感光材料では、ほぼ $\alpha=1$ であるが、図6(b)に示されたBの感光材料では、 $\alpha<1$ となっている。さらに問題を複雑化させる要因として考えられるのが、前述した1ピクセル内で点灯時間によって濃度を合わせようとする点である。

【0045】図5に示すように、同一電圧を印可した場合に発光光量が大いLED-Aの発光時間T1と、発光光量が低いLED-Bの発光時間T2の関係は、 $T1<T2$ の場合に結果としてピクセルAとピクセルBの濃度が同じように観察されることとなる。

【0046】ここで、図5に示すような場合、LED-

AとLED-Bの発光光量がオーバーラップする部分では、前述したように多重露光効果が発生し、感光材料によって濃度が変化する。しかしながら、2つのLEDの発光光量がオーバーラップしない部分についてはそのままの濃度が現れる。

【0047】したがって、正確に2つのピクセルを同一濃度にしようとした場合には、2つのLEDの発光光量がオーバーラップする部分がどれだけあるかという点とその感光材料の感度上昇率はどのようになっているかという点を考慮しなければならない。

【0048】実際の装置においては、複数の感光材料メーカーの複数種類の感光材料を扱う必要があり、それぞれの感光材料の感度上昇率は微妙に異なっている。しかしながら、全ての感光材料を用いた場合であっても、ムラのない良好な画像を得る為には、全てのLEDの点灯時間を制御して、ムラのない画像が得られる様に、予め補正值を求めておく必要がある。

【0049】そこで、本実施の形態例においては、新しく感光材料が装填される毎に、予め記憶された補正值検出用の画像を用いて、一旦露光を行い、現像処理を行って画像濃度として観測可能となった感光材料の濃度を測定し、測定された濃度差から、各ピクセル毎又はLED毎の補正值の修正値を求めるものである。

【0050】これによって、異なった感度上昇率を有する感光材料が装填されたとしても、当初の補正值を印画紙に応じて修正することで、ムラのない良好な画像が得られるように予め補正をすることが可能になる。

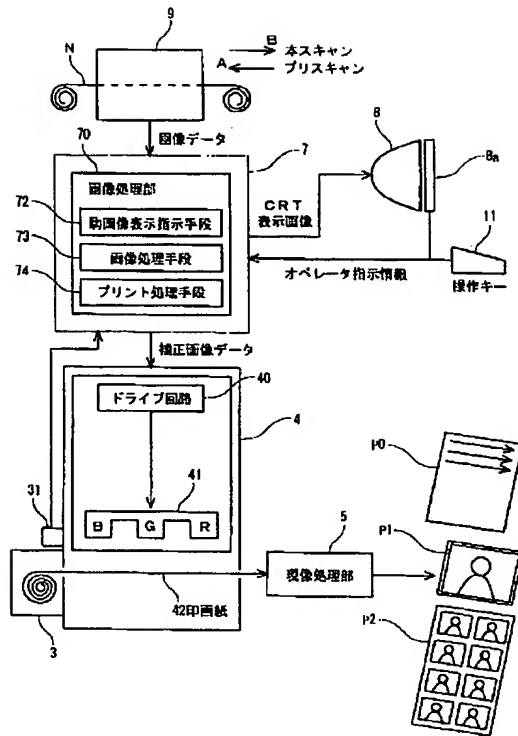
【0051】また、記録媒体が交換された場合でも、もとと全く同じ記録媒体に交換された場合には、改めて画素ムラ補正を行う必要はないことから、マガジン装填部3の印画紙の情報(メーカー名・ロット番号等を、突起の順番・バーコード・ICチップ等により持たせておく)をセンサ31により求め、前回まで使用していた記録媒体と今回新たに交換された記録媒体が異なる時のみ画素ムラ補正を行うように制御部7が制御を行う。

【0052】すなわち、記録媒体である印画紙42を格納した格納手段であるマガジン装填部3の交換について、センサ31からの検知信号に応じて、新たに交換された記録媒体がそれまでに使用されていた記録媒体と異なる場合に、制御部7がテストパターンを発生させ、そのテストパターンの露光を露光処理部4で行わせ、そのテストパターンが現像部5で現像されて可視画像のプリントとされる。そして、そのテストパターンのプリントPO(図2参照)を濃度センサ51で読み取り、その読み取り結果を制御部7にフィードバックする。そして、制御部7はテストパターンの読み取り結果を参照して、補正值の修正を行うようにしている。

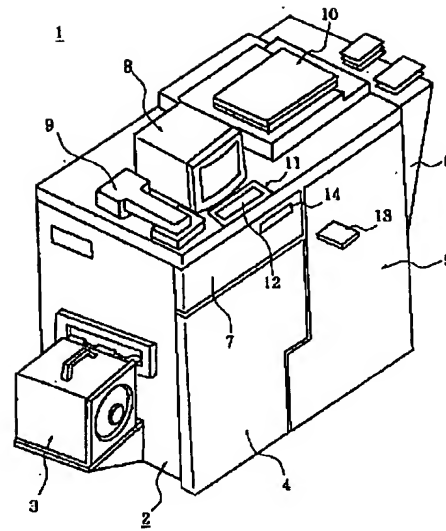
【0053】この結果、印画紙の交換時(マガジン装填部3の交換時)には、その印画紙に合致するように補正值が修正される。なお、センサ31を単純なものにし



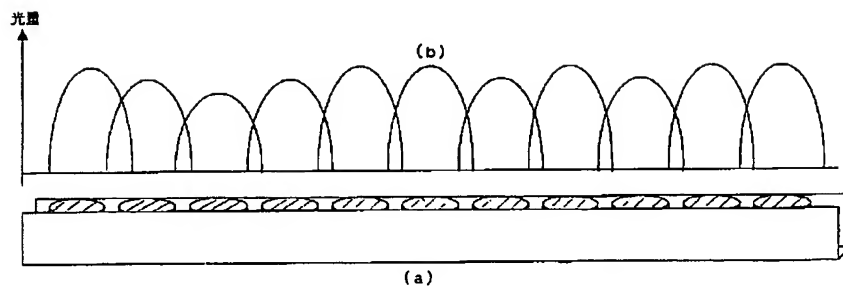
【図2】



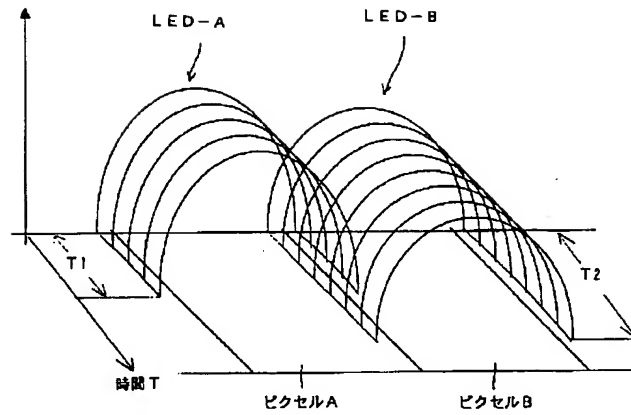
【図3】



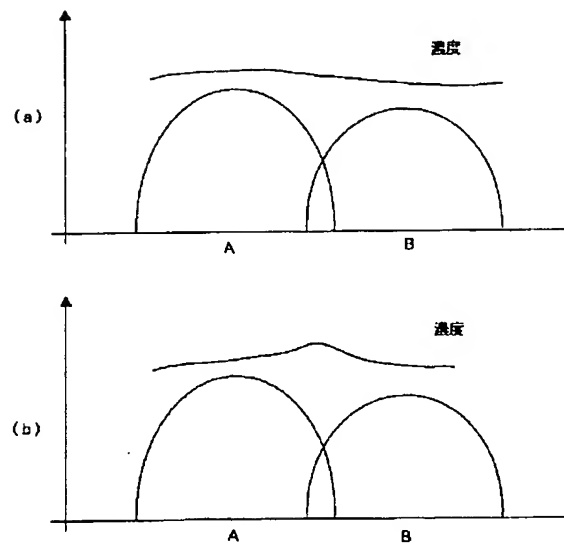
【図4】



【図5】



【図6】



フロントページの続き

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